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# Introduction

In the summer of 1999, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) of the U.S. Department of Education's (USED) Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) began a series of meetings to discuss how to align work on Equipped for the Future (EFF) Standards with work on the National Reporting System (NRS) being developed to meet reporting requirements on the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). By the following summer, NIFL and DAEL had developed a plan for a joint project intended to create strong linkages between the EFF Standards and the National Reporting System. The goal of the project was to enable programs using Equipped for the Future as a framework for instruction to report student progress from level to level on the NRS. The project would work with states that had chosen not to use an existing standardized instrument to report progress on the NRS by providing technical assistance that included training in the use of products, tools, and procedures that would support valid and reliable measures of educational gain using standardized alternative assessments. Specific outcomes proposed for the EFF/NRS Data Collection Project were to

• identify EFF Performance Tasks that represent the knowledge and skills necessary for transition from one NRS level to the next for up to 10 EFF Standards,

• identify transition tasks for movement between all 6 adult basic education (ABE) levels and all 6 English as a second language (ESL) levels on the National Reporting System for each EFF Standard, and

• develop a rich body of performance descriptors for each NRS level for each EFF Standard. These would be used to validate and enrich the existing body of level descriptors so that they are robust enough to support a standardized approach to assessment and reporting.

This final outcome was of particular importance in assuring a standardized approach to assessment within and across states. The performance level descriptors for the NRS Educational Functioning Levels for ABE and ESL had been designed for illustrative purposes only and are not specific enough to provide a basis for developing alternative assessment tasks and scoring guidelines. However, states that had chosen to give adult education programs an alternative to assessing educational gains using existing standardized test instruments were relying upon these instruments to determine whether students possessed the skills and knowledge necessary to move from one level to another. DAEL entered into partnership with NIFL on the EFF/NRS Data Collection Project because they saw that our

work in collecting data to build performance continua for each EFF standard could result in the research-based construct and research-based level descriptors that would support valid and reliable performance assessment.

The joint EFF/NRS Data Collection Project was launched in October 2000 with funding from DAEL, NIFL, and the five state adult education agencies that have been partners in this data collection effort: Maine, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington. In October 2001, a second year of the Data Collection Project was funded. This project is the primary vehicle for assuring that the continuum of increasingly skilled performance (described on page 8) constructed for each EFF Standard is aligned with actual student performance as well as with cognitive science research on cognition, learning, and the development of expertise.[1] The project also serves as an excellent professional development vehicle for participating practitioners, enabling them to build knowledge and skills in teaching with standards; creating and using learning activities with embedded assessment; and observing, documenting, and interpreting learner performance.

This report provides an overview of the accomplishments of the first year of the EFF/NRS Data Collection Project.[2] It includes a discussion of
- work carried out from October 2000–September 2001,
- the field research process and the practice-based learning of participants, and
- key lessons and their implications for the NRS.

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[1]See John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney Cockings, Eds. (1999). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind Experience and School.* (Washington DC: National Academy Press); Nadine M. Lambert and Barbara L. McCombs, Eds. (1998). *How Students Learn: Reforming Schools Through Learner-Centered Education* (Washington DC: America Psychological Association); and Jennifer Cromley, *Learning to Think, Learning to Learn: What the Science of Thinking and Learning has to Offer Adult Education* (2000) (Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy).

[2]For the first part of the project year, the work was managed by the Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee, with technical assistance provided by SRI International. In April 2001, a new EFF Assessment Consortium was awarded a contract from NIFL to complete the work of building the EFF Assessment Framework. The Consortium is a partnership between SRI and CLS, guided by a Technical Advisory Group, fully listed in Appendix A.